

Letters to The Times

How Cuba Affects West

Britain Sees U.S. Policy Creating
Conflict With Our Allies

The writer of the following letter, formerly editor of The Sunday Times of London, has published letters and articles on the national situation.

TORRE KERRON was New York Times; Among the well by-products of the Cuban trouble is the rising serious misunderstanding and conflict between the United States and her Western allies. Conflict which is likely if misunderstanding is cleared away. This is a two-way process.

Perhaps a British visitor may attempt a clarification from this side. British people generally fail to realise the geographical and strategic significance of Cuba to the United States. They do think that the Americans are over-zealous of a pro-Communist Government in Cuba. Do not we in Europe live year after year with the Soviet satellite just across the way? That Cuba herself could make war on the United States is ridiculous; whereas if there were war between the United States and the Soviet Union the status of Cuba would be a trifling matter in a global nuclear holocaust.

Soviet aid to the Castro regime is regarded as the inevitable consequence of American economic pressures; where else would Cuba turn for help when the United States put the financial squeeze on her? The "fishing port" is obviously a pretence, but unless it is to be made a cause belli it must, one would think, be tolerated.

Certainly no excuse is seen for interfering with the legitimate trade of third countries. Britain, as a great commercial and maritime nation is bound to defend as a vital interest the right of her shipping to pass freely on its lawful occasions—and she views a blockade as lawful only in a state of war, and even then upon conditions.

Sympathy With Castro

Apart from these more sophisticated arguments, there is in Britain a good deal of popular sympathy with Fidel Castro. Despite his violent excesses, he is still seen as a hero of the people who overthrew a tyrannous oligarchy. Memories of Suez cast their unhappy shadow. When Britain and France, faced with just such a situation as now confronts the United States, acted against Nasser's Egypt, what kind of support did they get from Washington? The Dulles administration's chickens are coming home to roost.

All this might seem to add up to a "hands-off Cuba" demand. That would indeed be the attitude of the left in Britain. But the better national approach is pragmatic rather than pontifical—namely, that if the United States regards the situation in Cuba as a serious threat to her security, then it is up to her to act to change it smartly and decisively.

Realistic policies of that sort are to be judged, not by their moral content, for they make no moral claims, but by their practical success or failure. Success will be respected; failure will leave the blame undiffused. The policies, however, that must certainly be wrong are those of protracted pressure short of war which, without any guarantee or even probability of success, are bound to involve the interests and policies of third parties.

If the United States is not prepared to overthrow Castro by whatever measures are necessary to do so, she must surely accept him and come to terms with him. A middling attitude, "ready to wound but yet afraid to strike," can only create a festering sore in the body of Atlantic relations. And in the long run, there are much more important things than anything that happens in Cuba.

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